



State of Wisconsin
Department of Health and Family Services

Jim Doyle, Governor
Helene Nelson, Secretary

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For Immediate Release

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WATCH OUT FOR DEER TICKS

May is Lyme Disease Awareness Month

MADISON – State health officials are reminding people to be on the lookout for ticks that can cause Lyme disease.

Statewide surveillance of Lyme disease has been conducted in Wisconsin since 1980 to track human cases of the disease and to identify areas of the state most affected. In 2005, there were record high 1,441 cases of Lyme disease; that's up from 1,176 cases in 2004. While Lyme disease has been reported in many areas around Wisconsin, most cases in 2005 occurred in the western half of the state.

Lyme disease is caused by a bacteria carried by small ticks called deer ticks, which are found in many parts of the United States, including Wisconsin. The disease can cause debilitating arthritis, as well as serious heart and nervous system problems.

“In Wisconsin, most people who develop Lyme disease are exposed to infected ticks between May and August,” said Dr. Mark Sotir, epidemiologist. “The greatest risk of developing the illness is during June and July.”

There are preventive measures people can take to avoid tick bites and reduce the chance of getting Lyme disease. They include:

- Avoid wooded and bushy areas with high grass and lots of leaf litter since ticks prefer these areas. If you do go into areas like this, try to stay in the center of a cleared trail to avoid contact with overgrown grass, brush, and leaf litter.
- Use effective tick repellants and apply according to the label instructions. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that adults use repellants with 20-30% DEET on exposed skin and clothing to prevent tick bites. Repellants that contain permethrin can also be applied to clothing. Again, be sure to follow the label directions whenever using repellants.
- Wear clothes that will help to shield you from ticks. Long-sleeved shirts and long pants are best. Tuck your pants into the top of your socks or boots, to create a “tick barrier.”
- Check frequently for ticks, and remove them promptly. Ticks actually have to bite you – and remain attached for one to two days – to transmit Lyme disease. Deer ticks are small and may be difficult to find, so tick checks must be done carefully.
- Remove attached ticks slowly and gently, using a thin-bladed pair of tweezers. Avoid folk remedies like petroleum jelly, nail polish remover or burning matches – they are not safe or effective in removing ticks.

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- Protect your pets from tick bites by checking your dog or cat for ticks before allowing them inside. While there is a vaccine available for pets to prevent Lyme disease, it will not stop the animal from bringing ticks into the home. Speak to your veterinarian about topical tick repellent available for pets.

The disease is treated with oral or injectable antibiotics, and is more easily treated when detected early. One early symptom of Lyme disease is a characteristic “bull’s-eye” rash, consisting of a reddened area, often with a clear area in the middle, at the original site of the tick bite. The rash typically expands in size to cover a large area (usually greater than two inches), or may even appear in several places on other parts of the body.

“Not everyone with Lyme disease develops the rash,” said Sotir. “If someone lives or has spent time in areas where deer ticks are common and develops symptoms such as fever, headache, chills, and pain in the muscles or joints, they should immediately consult their health care provider.”

For information about Lyme disease and other tick-borne diseases in your community, contact your local health department or visit <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/communicable/LymeDisease/index.htm>

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